

*The obtaining of the Divine Approbation, by
Dividing the Word of Truth aright,
the supreme Object of a Christian Minister's
Pursuit.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE
ORDINATION
OF THE

REV. *JAMES CALDWELL,*

In the Protestant Dissenting Congregation of
DUNDONNALD, *Sept. 1, 1772.*

Published at the DESIRE of the MINISTERS, and
a Number of other respectable GENTLEMEN,
who heard it.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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BELFAST: Printed by H. and R. JOY, 1773.



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S E R M O N, &c.

2d. TIM. ii. 15.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

THE desire of Excelling is, perhaps, one of the most natural affections of the human mind, and one that enters, with the greatest ease, into the infinite variety of pursuits and employments in which men are engaged. Excellence is that which sets men up to view, and which renders them objects of attention: And how powerful an influence this circumstance hath upon the affairs of the world, must be known to all. Few are willing to live in an unknown obscurity; and scarcely any employment of the life of man is so far removed from the

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inspection

inspection of others, but that he who fills it wisheth to dazzle the eyes of his few and obscure observers with a ray of splendor peculiar to himself. Even the hermit, who hath sworn a fullen allegiance to retirement, finds some object of ambition in his unnatural solitude. Every man is prone to the society of his fellow-men, delights in their approbation, and spurns the thought of being the most contemptible of the species.

It is not therefore to be denied that this is an original part of the human constitution: a principle which may indeed require much management; but which, certainly, ought not to be rooted out.

Experience, at the same time, shews that no principle, when abused, has been productive of greater mischiefs to the world, than that of which I speak. Hence, government hath degenerated into tyranny; power, into oppression; conquest, into devastation; and even the love of science itself, into a lordly domination over the understandings of mankind. Every man, who doth not subject this principle to the invariable direction of one that is higher and more sacred, lays the foundation of his imaginary excellence upon the extravagancies of that passion, whatever it be, from the gratification of which, he expects to derive the greatest self-enjoyment. The covetous



covetous desire to excel in wealth ; the ambitious, in power or honour ; and the luxurious, in the variety and elegance of their entertainments. Hence infinite misery to individuals : hence too general a confusion in the affairs of men.

Nothing therefore can be of greater importance, either to the public or to individuals, than that men should seriously consider in what they ought to excel, and to whose approbation they should be most anxious to recommend themselves. Were this object kept in view by all, the world would abound in universal virtue, and be blessed with universal tranquility. Men aiming at things which are the just foundations of solid distinction, could have few occasions of an interfering interest to create quarrels, and would infallibly rise to an high excellence of temper and character. The true honour of humanity rests upon one common basis, and the fabric must, by all, be reared out of the same common materials. Virtue, true goodness, holiness of heart and life, to be distinguished for acquiring and promoting the enlargements of the understanding and the improvements of the heart--these comprize the real objects of a laudable ambition, and constitute the foundation of lasting distinction.

This is the doctrine of the Gospel, with regard to all the employments and professions

essions of life: *Seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, and all other things shall be added unto you.* And the general reproach of the world is; that men are *anxious to receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only.*

If then the love of Excellence, which is common to all mankind, and which enters into the meanest employment of human life, ought thus to be rendered subservient to the great purposes of virtue and religion, in general; what are we left to conclude concerning the management of the same principle in a particular order of men, *the ministers of the Gospel*, whose very business and profession it is, to study religion, and to promote the interests of virtue in the world? Were the word of God silent upon this head, we could not help concluding from the general principle already mentioned, that the admonition in the text is addressed, with peculiar propriety and force, to every man of this order.---*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.*

I. Indeed the most obvious reasons present themselves to satisfy every mind, that we ought to study above all things to shew ourselves approved unto God.

FIRST :

FIRST: Whatever corresponds to the convictions of the understanding, and fully satisfies the demands of conscience; *that* every person believes to be acceptable to God, and approved by him. Conscience we revere as the messenger of heaven: and her pure and uncorrupted dictates are that original standard of rectitude and goodness, which Almighty God hath set up in every human bosom, and consecrated to be the immediate rule and guide of life. We cannot neglect, therefore, to shew ourselves approved unto God, without transgressing the first law of our nature, and offering violence to the most exalted principle of our constitution.

AGAIN: We have received all our powers of action and enjoyment from Almighty God: We enjoy them only by the continuance of his bounty, and cannot exercise them but by the support and permission of his good providence. We therefore lie under the most solemn obligations, both of gratitude and duty, to employ whatever we possess, as he designed it, and to concur with the great purposes of his administration in all the actions of our lives. We live but by the goodness of the God that made us: we ought therefore to live to his honour, and to make his will our law and guide.--To Heaven alone we stand indebted for all the sources of enjoyment
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with which our nature is enriched, and happy we cannot be, but by using those very means, which God hath recommended. This is a law as unchangeable as the course of nature, and as lasting as the authority of God. While we strictly conform to this rule we cannot miss of the divine approbation, because we concur with his irreverfible purposes; nor fail of happiness, because Omnipotence is on our fide. This is the voice of nature, the conclusion of reason, and the venerable testimony of universal experience. Every person therefore, who retains the leaft fenfe of duty to the Almighty Sovereign of the univerfe; or feels the fmalleft degree of gratitude to the unbounded fource of all being, and to the universal benefactor of every living nature; must be convinced that he is bound, by the moft folemn ties, to fhew himfelf approved unto God.

BESIDE: Man's trueft excellence lies in the obtaining of the divine approbation. Men may be impofed on, and deceived: They may either judge amifs concerning the genuine principles and real nature of human worth: and fo crown that with reputation which deserves contempt: or, being miffed by an outside fhew of unftantial goodnefs, they may pay that refpect to the fhadow, which the fubftance only has a right to claim. It is therefore a fmall matter

matter to be judged of man's judgment :--- But God searcheth the heart : Being himself the perfect standard, he is likewise the unerring judge of whatever is great, amiable, or excellent. To stand approved therefore in the judgment of Heaven, is to secure the infallible suffrage of supreme rectitude and universal perfection in favour of our worth.---What can recommend us to the approbation of such a Being, but that which is substantially good, and truly praise-worthy in its own nature ? The more attention therefore we employ in pressing towards the mark of perfection, the higher we advance in the scale of moral worth ; the more closely we copy the purity and excellence of Almighty God himself, the more certainly we may expect to shew ourselves approved to him.

IN SHORT : God is not only qualified by his supreme perfection to decide, with unerring certainty, concerning what is good and worthy ; but he has likewise assured us, partly by the intimations of nature, and in the clearest and most express manner by the declarations of the Gospel, that he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and render to all men according to the respective worth or demerit of their several characters : For, God is no respecter of persons. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he

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also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting: and let us not be weary in well doing; for in due time we shall reap if we faint not.

How remote soever we may think ourselves from the divine inspection at present; we shall one day find that *his eyes are on the ways of men*, that *he beboldeth all their goings*, and that *he will render to every man*, with the strictest impartiality, *according to his works*. And is it not a very solemn thought, that we shall all be presented before the judgment seat of the eternal God? that our characters shall be displayed in all their parts, and our actions exposed to view with all their circumstances? that supreme perfection, unstained purity, and inflexible justice, shall decide upon our conduct? and that omnipotence itself shall execute the awful sentence? In this most solemn uncorrupted court, the arts of subterfuge and evasion, of palliation and disguise, of chicane and quibble, shall not dare to make their appearance; and even the eloquence of prayers, and tears, and strong remorse, shall be employed in vain. It shall be proclaimed from the lofty throne of God, in a voice more awful than the loudest thunder: *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him*

him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. This sentence shall be irreverfible, and fix our fate for ever. Eternal honours fhall be upon the head of the righteous; but the wicked fhall inherit everlafting fhame and confufion of face. Infinitely then doth it concern us all, to ufe our utmoft diligence to fhew ourfelves approved unto God, the Almighty, upright and moft impartial judge.

These confiderations inforcing the advice in the text are common to the minifters of the Gofpel, with all others. But as the advice is addreffed with peculiar emphasis to *Timothy* under the character of a teacher of religion; and of courfe, through him, to all others who fill the fame ftation and exercife the fame employment:

II. It may not therefore be improper, in the next place, to point out fome circumftances, which oblige the minifters of the Gofpel, with additional force, to ftudy to fhew themfelves approved unto God.

The FIRST of thefe that ftrikes the mind is, that the very office of a christian minifter is derived immediately from the authority and appointment of Almighty God. Every lawful employment in a well regulated ftate may, indeed, be faid, in a certain

sense, to be of divine original: for God is the author of society, and therefore, indirectly at least, of every thing necessary to its support and comfort. But the care of souls, and the preaching of the Gospel, are, in the most direct manner, a peculiar and distinguishing appointment of that holy religion, with which Almighty God was pleased to bless and enlighten the world by Jesus Christ. Human wisdom and the policy of states had no hand in the original appointment: and though the office was ordained for the sake of men, and the ordinary introduction into it must be by men; yet the person who is once clothed with this character ought to consider himself as the immediate servant of the great Author of this sacred order; and the servant of man, only from a sense of duty and obedience to Jesus Christ, from a sincere regard to the cause of truth, and from a hearty concern for the eternal interest of his fellow creatures. His office bears so close a relation to the appointment of God, that to approve himself to the judgment of man, ought to be no part of his first and leading aim. To use the words of Saint Paul upon another occasion; *he should be obedient to his Lord and Master, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart; not with eye-service, as a man-pleaser; but*

but as the servant of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

In most of the employments of human life, he who fills them in such a manner, as to gain the approbation of them by whom he is employed, and who have a right to pronounce upon his conduct, may conclude that he hath done well, and discharged his duty with advantage to others, and with credit to himself. His duty is, to approve himself to men. Not so the christian minister. He, indeed, is ordained for men: The utmost design of his office and ministrations, is to extend the knowledge, to promote the virtue, and to increase the happiness of the human race. Yet from the very nature of his office, especially from its peculiar relation to the divine appointment, the bare approving of himself to mankind must appear to be an acquisition, poor indeed. Men are not his master; nor may their opinions be any part of his guide in discharging the important duties of his station. Might men be governed in the exercise of this profession by the prejudices and sentiments of a deluded world, thousands in this station, who are now most justly branded with the darkest characters of ambition, of avarice, and of gross dissimulation in the things of God, would have deserved the high honour of
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canonization, which some of them have obtained upon the polluted altars of a degenerate church. But upon the same principle, you must tear the laurels from the brows of that venerable host, the army of Martyrs, and of all the great and good in every age and nation; who, rather than violate their allegiance to their Sovereign Lord, or court the approbation of mankind by a mean compliance with the errors of the times, braved the resentment of an enraged world, and boldly stood forth in defence of truth at the hazard of their lives, and, alas! too often with the loss of every earthly thing that can administer delight to the heart of man. To God alone, therefore, it is the christian minister's great business, to shew himself approved, in every duty of his office. In truth, every duty of his office, as it ariseth merely out of the appointment of Almighty God, becomes an act of religion; and therefore, as far as the individual is concerned, as far as his moral character and final state depend upon it, it is a transaction between God and himself only. This therefore is a consideration of great weight, why men of this order should be peculiarly studious to shew themselves approved unto God.

A SECOND is, The greatness and importance of the office itself. We are appointed * *ministers of Christ*, † *stewards of the manifold grace of God*, ‡ *to divide aright the word of truth*, and be overseers of the flock of God which is among us; which we are bound to feed as much as in us lieth, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. That so when the chief shepherd shall appear, we may receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away.---Not to say that we are fully commissioned to § *exhort and rebuke with all authority*.

How venerable now in its own nature must that office be, which the wisdom of the Christian institution hath marked with characters of such high significance? and of what mighty moment, the end it is intended to serve? How solemnly important in themselves, and how deeply interesting to the world, are the various duties expressed, or implied, in the several passages referred to above? The bare recital of them arrests the soul in the most profound attention, and fills it with amazement, that we should have this treasure in earthen vessels. To be immediate servants of

* Cor. iv. 1.

† 1 Pet. iv. 10.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 2, 3, 4.

§ Tit. ii. 15.

of the adored Jesus ; to be stewards of the manifold grace of God ; to distribute aright the word of truth among the heirs of immortality ; to feed the flock of Heaven ; and to exhort mankind, and reprove their follies, with all authority, long-suffering and doctrine ! Justly may we cry out in the language of the apostle ; *who is sufficient for these things !*---How awfully solemn is our undertaking ? Do we indeed hold our station, as it were, in common with the Angels of the divine presence, who, in a like subjection to Jesus Christ, are sent forth to minister to those, who shall be heirs of Salvation ? Are our labours to center in the same point with the exalted office of God's holy Spirit, in leading mankind to glory and to virtue ? Have we embarked in the same amazing cause with the Brightness of the Father's Glory ? Are we to be fellow-workers with Almighty God himself, the supreme, eternal, uncreated Mind, in his admirable scheme of unbounded mercy ? I dare boldly say that the proudest monarch of the greatest empire in the world fills not a place of more importance, holds not a trust of greater moment. *He* is bound to labour for publick peace, and publick order. *His* duty is, to provide for the present glory, and the present happiness, of those he governs. But his attention to the *manners* of his people,

people, the very hinge upon which their salvation turns, can extend no farther, (merely as a civil magistrate) than these ends require. These things constitute the great design of his whole employment; and seldom doth he carry his views farther, or divert them into another channel, without commencing tyrant. His laws neither do nor can reach farther, than to the outward conduct, and worldly prosperity of those, whom choice, or accident, hath made his subjects. --- Even in this way, a good prince may do much for the support of real virtue.

But *our* object is entirely the soul, and the eternal world: and the everlasting destruction of one immortal spirit is an event of more woe, than the total overthrow of a thousand empires. For what is time, and all the advantages that skill and policy can croud into it, compared to the endless revolutions of the eternal world? What are the most refined supports of human life? the most luxurious gratifications of sensual appetite? the most flattering objects of ambition that this state affords? What are they all, compared to the improvements of a pure spirit; to the enjoyments, which address themselves to the soul alone; or to that glory of the life to come, *which fadeth not away?*

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ought to promote : these are the ends, at which we ought always to aim. Our business is, not to render mankind rich and powerful here on earth ; but to endeavour to render them strong in faith and rich towards God. Though the good and wise must be pleased with every improvement that is either useful or ornamental to the publick ; yet we are to contrive, not how to improve society with the fruits of commerce, the refinements of luxury or the embellishments of art ; but how to enrich the soul with the stores of wisdom, how to adorn the heart with the beauty of holiness, and how to extend that truest luxury, the exalted and uncloying pleasure of a good heart and an approving conscience. In a word, we are to be employed entirely about those things, upon which the wisdom, the virtue, and the eternal happiness of mankind depend. Nothing surely can be more important than these great concerns : and hence the importance and interesting nature of that office, which has them for its proper and peculiar object.

Can any thing then be more reasonable, than that men to whom so great a trust is committed, should make conscience of discharging it with proportionable zeal and diligence ? Is not the very greatness of the undertaking an equitable reason
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why God should require, that persons, voluntarily engaging in it, should be habitually influenced by a serious sense of its momentous nature? If those, who are concerned in transacting the ordinary business of this unimportant life, lie under the strongest obligations to approve their conduct to the majesty of Heaven; much more surely ought we to feel the force of this conviction, to whom a trust of infinitely greater moment is committed. In this the kind and tender affections of the heart ought strongly to co-operate with our integrity, and sense of duty. To overlook even the trifles that affect humanity, is not free from blame; and to betray a trust, however inconsiderable, argues a soul of little worth, a heart void of that stern and inflexible integrity, which clothes human nature with the most honourable and manly grace. But to be indifferent to the substantial miseries that distress the world, is the character of a soul steeled against compassion; and to betray a trust, upon which the happiness of our fellow-creature depends, perhaps for life, is the part of a villain just ripe to be ignominiously cut off from the blessings of society. What then are we to conclude of him, who is regardless of the eternal welfare of immortal spirits, and can dare to sport with the most solemn

trust that ever was committed to any mortal? The good Samaritan considered the maimed body of a fellow-man, the citizen of an hostile nation, as the object of his tenderness: but the savage monster of whom I speak, is regardless of the eternal welfare of the tender lamb of his own flock, the endeared child of his own family! Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, be ye terribly afraid!

A THIRD consideration to the same purpose, ariseth out of that which I have now mentioned. In proportion to the greatness and importance of the office, shall be the reward of those who have discharged it with care. If he that is faithful over a few things meets his master's approbation, and is appointed ruler over many; surely he who discovers the same integrity and zeal in conducting a greater charge, hath all the reason in the world to look for a higher promotion, and to expect that he shall receive a greater and more honourable reward. Hence we are told that they who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness (the sole object of a minister's labour) as the stars for ever and ever. Hence our Lord assures his holy Apostles, who were to be distinguishedly instrumental in turning the world to truth and righteousness, that in
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his Kingdom they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of *Israel*: By the use of this figure, leading them to hope that if they acted worthy of their high Apostolate, they should in the end arrive at the greatest honour and most exalted rank in the kingdom of God; the judging, or government, of a single tribe being the highest station that was compatible with the pure, original principles of the *Jewish* republick. And must we not conceive that the punishment of neglect is grievous, in the very same proportion, in which the reward of faithfulness is great? Dreadful must his condemnation be, who is banished from the presence of the Lord, for this cause, that he hath been an unfaithful steward of the manifold grace of God! Horrible must his ruin be, who is therefore destroyed, because God set him upon the watch-tower, and he saw the enemy at hand, and and gave no warning of his approach! He must fall himself, it is true, and become a part of the common ruin: but alas! his unfaithfulness hath drawn after it the fall, perhaps, of thousands. At whose hand, then, will God require the blood of those who are thus taken by surprize, and cut off unawares? at the hand, assuredly, of the unfaithful watchman.

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Take heed, (saith the Apostle *Paul* to his beloved *Timothy*) take heed unto thyself, and to thy doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. *Thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee!* How great a merit! how worthy an object of the most towering ambition; How transportingly delightful to a good mind is the glorious prospect, that, by *beedfulness and perseverance*, the Christian minister shall not only save himself, but likewise those that hear him! How deeply interesting is this thought; that the holy Scriptures seem to represent us as sharing in all the worth and wisdom, which our industry is the means of promoting, and as participating in the blessedness and honours of all those, who, through our ministrations and labour of love, have been seriously engaged in the practice of religion? Thus the Apostle *Paul* to the *Thessalonians*: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming? for ye are our glory and our joy.” And what shall be the dread, the anguish and eternal disgrace of the unfaithful pastor? The hated sight and bitter execrations of those, whom his dishonesty, neglect, or ill example hath been the means of involving in perdition!

perdition ! How deep a sharer is he in their guilt ! how deeply therefore must he share in all the horrors that await the crimes which they have committed through his fault ?---Is not this then a motive of the most solemn import, arising out of the nature of our office, to excite us to study with the utmost care to shew ourselves approved unto God ?

III. Instead of spending more of your time in explaining the peculiar and distinguishing obligations, which lie upon the teachers of religion, to discharge their duty with a particular regard to the majesty of Heaven ; I shall now beg leave to suggest farther, That the text seems to signify, that men in this office ought not to satisfy themselves with the bare consolation that they may stand approved. They are not only to approve themselves ; but they are to approve themselves so, *as workmen that need not to be ashamed.* They ought not only to endeavour to discharge their duty, but to discharge it with reputation. They ought to be honest and irreproachable in their station : they ought to be more ; they should study to excel in it. They should endeavour to acquit themselves in such a manner, that the weakness of humanity being charitably allowed for, they may have no disgrace from the place they

they fill in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Their behaviour should be so ordered, as to reflect honour upon their exalted master and his most honourable service.---This seems to be the meaning of the text.---I shall therefore proceed to consider how a teacher of the Gospel may approve himself to God in such a manner, that he shall not need to be ashamed.

Now, to judge aright of this part of the subject, which is indeed most interesting to us all, our best method will be to borrow our ideas from the clause with which the text concludes: viz. *rightly dividing the word of truth*. To divide aright the word of truth, is that important, comprehensive duty, in the faithful discharge of which, the great excellence of the Christian ministry consists.

The word of truth, it is self-evident, is designed to express the doctrines taught, and the Duties enjoined, by the Christian religion; and to divide this aright must, as evidently, signify the wise, rational and conscientious preaching of the Gospel.

Hence it is plain that the book of God is the great subject of the preacher's study. As this comprizes the important knowledge, which his duty binds him to communicate; he cannot be a teacher above contempt, without possessing a competent knowledge of it himself. It contains those
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treasures of divine knowledge, which are able to make men wise unto salvation: this therefore he is to understand and explain. Now it is a maxim of undoubted truth, that even the plainer and more elementary parts of any science cannot be taught in a masterly manner, without a thorough and commanding knowledge both of the science itself, and of the several kindred branches to which it is immediately related. It is not sufficient for a teacher to understand the various conclusions which he delivers: he ought to be able, as it were with intuitive force and quickness, to comprehend the principles out of which they arise, the consequences which they imply, and the different truths from which they receive evidence, and to which they give it.

The various erudition, then, which is requisite to this just and comprehensive understanding of the holy Scriptures, every judge of science and of the principles of criticism, may easily conceive.

---Every divine revelation depends entirely for its evidence, and in some measure for its meaning too, upon previous principles of knowledge, and previous convictions concerning the evidence of truth.

For after all that ever hath been, or that ever can be revealed to us, in our present state; we never can believe that

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to be true, which contradicts the original convictions of the understanding, or which overturns the conclusions that evidently arise out of them. These we can never sacrifice, without sacrificing along with them every principle of belief, and tearing up the very foundations upon which all knowledge, human and divine, is built. That therefore which ariseth out of the original sources of belief which God hath given us; the conclusions which are clearly supported by the testimony of experience, by the feelings of the heart, by the works of God, or by the ways of Providence, ought to be revered as the hallowed voice of nature, as the unerring dictates of a sacred guide. These seeds of knowledge should therefore be cherished by the most liberal culture, and the fruit preserved with the greatest care.

Again: The word of God itself contains in the clearest and most express manner some general principles with regard to the nature and perfections of Almighty God, the ways of his providence, and the motives by which he is influenced in his treatment of mankind and his designs of mercy towards them. These outlines therefore of the system of revelation should be studied with the greatest diligence, and when once they are understood, should be laid

laid down as certain and invariable rules of interpretation. They should be employed to lead us to the true meaning of such things as seem obscure and intricate, and obscure passages ought never to be introduced to perplex their meaning. This rule we follow in the interpretation of every other writing which is supposed to be consistent with itself: common sense therefore pronounceth that it ought to be most religiously observed here. In truth it would be extremely strange if, in a book designed for the common use of all mankind, there were not some general principles, some leading scheme, some clear declarations, which might serve as a master-key to open the way into the more intricate recesses, and give the world an opportunity of judging of those things, at least, which are most important. In this way, it is not to be doubted, that the christian divine may arrive at a considerable knowledge of the Mystery of Godliness: and the things mentioned in this and the foregoing article, appear to me to be the first objects of a preacher's study. Here his labours ought to begin: in this track he ought frequently to walk.

But the accomplished expounder of the word of God has a wide field of investigation still before him. Let him consider
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the distance of time at which the several sacred books were written; the different languages in which they appear; the principles they contain; the events they record; the customs to which they refer; the prevailing opinions which modify speech in different ages and in distant countries; the influence of government upon the manners of a people; the flux of language, and how all things are tossed in the tide of time, and exposed to danger in its perpetual agitation: Let him consider these things, and he will easily perceive how deeply he ought to engage in researches into antiquity; of what languages he should study to be master; what an acquaintance with history, both sacred and profane, he should endeavour to possess; how laboriously he should examine the various modes of ancient science, and of ancient life; with what zeal and diligence he should cultivate the principles of solid knowledge; and strive to penetrate the sources of just and liberal criticism,---if he would arrive at a masterly command of that true wisdom which the scriptures contain, and be able to disengage it from those perplexities and misrepresentations, in which ignorance and error have involved it. He must perceive too how requisite it is to bring to this study a mind already strengthened

ened and expanded by the noble principles of human science.

The narrow thoughts of puny Theologians have too long been matter of reproach in the world of letters. What then would relieve us from so base an imputation? The answer is; engage in these studies with unshaken firmness; bring with you a mind animated with the love of knowledge, and with zeal for truth. Exalt your spirit above the prejudice of party, above the authority of great names, above the feeble breath of popular applause and a low regard to worldly interests. Let this conviction be deeply rooted in your heart, that one is your master, even Jesus Christ; and that all men, and all sects of men, are but brethren: brethren, who should be united in affection, but have no claim to exercise authority one over another. And farther, if the sanction of this place may embolden me to advise, I would take the liberty of recommending to every student of divine things, that he should carefully settle in his own mind, THE NATURE AND DEGREE OF EVIDENCE WHICH THE VARIOUS OBJECTS OF HIS STUDY SEVERALLY ADMIT OF, AND THE KIND OF PROOF WHICH SHOULD SATISFY THE UNDERSTANDING IN EACH. To expect, for instance, that kind of evidence, or degree of proof, in the researches of criticism,

criticism, which agrees only to the nature of mathematical reasoning, is to lay yourself under an inevitable necessity of rejecting truth. In this pursuit every person is to be guided by the ordinary principles of common sense, and must derive his conclusions from his own stores: for I know not where else he should go to meet with any considerable assistance. Let him be assured, he will find his reward in this most useful, though much neglected labour. He will soon discover, that every branch of learning has a logick peculiar to itself. He will perceive, that to the neglect of this very thing, the generality of readers owe that feebleness and fluctuation of mind, which expose them to be of the same opinion with any ingenious, or even plausible, author, whose works they last perused. To this we are indebted for the number of those, who are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Bigotry, pride, prejudice, any thing, may produce an obstinate perseverance in the same opinions: but without an attention to this point, nothing can produce the inflexible firmness of rational conviction; nothing can render the mind truly master of itself, or truly master of any thing that comes under its examination.

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Let it be observed, however, that this extent of knowledge, this manliness of thought, this variety of learning, are not to be expected from almost any person, at his entrance into holy orders. No: they are to be acquired by slow degrees, and will employ a life-time. But every man, who would shew himself a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, will surely aim at excellence by all the means that God hath given him. He will do it for his own honour; for the honour of his master; for the honour of the Christian Cause; and for the honour of everlasting truth and righteousness. Another circumstance, too, might serve to excite US to diligence and application, in this enlightened age: I mean, our own personal interest, and the interest and reputation of the cause of liberty, in which we have embarked, as protestant dissenters. Both of these depend, not a little, upon our abilities, and our character for piety and learning.

IV. The crown of victory is not to be obtained by the best preparation for engaging in the contest. Fresh labours still appear, and our young champion must boldly struggle with farther difficulties. Suppose him now to understand the word of

of truth ; his next business is to *divide it aright.*

His first wisdom here, will consist in a just selection of those things, which are of real moment to the cause of virtue, and to the souls of men. Not every intricacy of science ; not every circumstance of a minute criticism ; not every change of ever-changing system, is either worthy of the attention, level to the understanding, or connected with the interest, of the great body of the christian people. Let our preacher, therefore, ever remember the great design of his holy vocation. He is called to extend the knowledge of useful truth, as the great expedient for promoting the practice of solid goodness. Those things therefore which are calculated to reach the heart and to influence the conduct ; to lead us to the love and practice of our duty ; to raise our affections to heaven, and to fill us with joy and comfort in believing, are the great objects which ought chiefly to employ our own meditations, and to fill the ears, and warm the hearts, of those who hear us. We should shun all profane and vain babblings ; (as it followeth after the text) for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat, as doth a canker. Foolish and unlearned questions, we are also commanded to avoid, knowing
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that they gender strife; and the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men.

But, in the next place; when a man is once satisfied in his own conscience about those things which are really subservient to the cause of God and the interest of religion; he ought to lay them before the world with the greatest plainness and simplicity, with the most unshaken boldness and fortitude. The love of truth, above all things; above reputation, above riches, above life itself, should ever be the guide of those that serve him, *who is the way, the truth and the life*. A mean compliance with the prevailing prejudices and errors of the times, however supported by publick authority, or sanctified by the reverence of the multitude, is a shameful sacrifice of truth, and a base desertion of the Lord that bought us. In all such cases, a man should be able to assert, in the face of day, that *he had declared the whole counsel of God, and kept nothing back*. Thus he shall *be free from the blood of all men*. But to trim, and turn, and yield to every blast of popular caprice, is a shameful desertion of the glorious post assigned us by God, as guardians of truth, and ministers of righteousness.

Again: Laboriousness and application ought ever to distinguish that minister,
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who would wish to divide the word of truth in such a manner, that he should not need to be ashamed. In this, sure I am, I have the suffrage of the ablest and most experienced preachers; and the wisest of the people cannot fail to be of the same mind. Superficial preparation is the certain source of flimsy, unsubstantial preaching: It argues a mind no way impressed with a becoming sense of the great importance of our sacred function. He who seriously considers, as in the dread presence of Almighty God, that he is to act as the ambassador of Jesus Christ, and in his name to beseech mankind to be reconciled unto God, will not surely indulge to indolence in the execution of so great a trust, or habitually talk at random. Let him reflect, also, that he is bound to study the interest of religion in the midst of a perverse generation of giddy, thoughtless, inattentive men; to render the most sublime truths level to their unimproved understandings, and to bring the most difficult and irksome duties home to their callous hearts, and to consciences, alas! too generally defiled. How then ought he to labour in the study of human nature, and of the various arts by which their attention may be gained, and their affections touched? Should his heart ever be warmed with sincere zeal for the cause

cause of virtue and a becoming concern for the salvation of his flock ; there are three things which he will carefully avoid: the unmeaning looseness of a wandering declamation ; the trim neatness of a philosophick essay, and the useless beauty of a modern sentimental bauble. He will find, that Christian duty is best enforced by the weight, and influence, and authority of the Christian doctrines themselves ; which, in their native and unadorned simplicity, rouse the affections of the heart, and fill the grasp of the most enlarged understanding. Nay, even in the subordinate parts of a discourse, experience will teach him, if he be patient to observe, that the minuteness of ornament toucheth not the multitude at all : that it is the greatness, the solemnity and seriousness, not the polish or refinement, of the things that we deliver, which have any real influence upon the manners of the people.

But our labours ought not to be confined to the pulpit. We are to be instant in season, and out of season : that is ; we are to take every prudent occasion of giving wholesome instruction, whether it be offered in the stated seasons of our publick devotion, or by the nature of our more private intercourse with the several members of our respective flocks.

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All these things are evident demands for labour and industry. But above all, let every preacher be able to affirm with David: *neither will I offer unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nothing.* I speak unto wise men; judge ye what I say.

IN CONCLUSION: Let it ever be remembered, that the most sacred part of our character is that of being examples to the flock. If impiety; if covetousness; if pride and lordliness of temper; if luxury or lust, mark our characters; the eloquence of an Angel, and the knowledge of the most enlarged understanding, would not be sufficient to recommend us to mankind; and must, therefore, fall infinitely short of shewing us *approved unto God.*

Let us therefore study to approve ourselves *as the ministers of Christ, by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, and by the armour of righteousness on the right hand, and on the left.*



T H E E N D.